

TESTIMONY on Senate Bill #2:

An Act Concerning Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children.

Public Hearing March 9, 2021

My name is John Bestor and I am a retired school psychologist.

I want to ask you to tread very carefully on passage of aspects of this Senate Committee Bill pertaining to

1. the exclusion of parental consent prior to referral of minors for out-patient mental health treatment, and
2. the requirement that teachers make determinations as to hardship conditions of the families of their students.

This Committee Bill appears to be a piece of omnibus legislation that is intended to correct many community and school shortcomings, but will probably serve to exacerbate problems, especially for vulnerable children and marginalized families. Once again, the Legislature is attempting to address specific issues on the edges while failing to address the underlying conditions associated with socio-economic stress and healthy environments.

The idea that the State can neglect to inform parents who are the student's primary caregiver that their child has been referred for and received up to six sessions of out-patient mental health treatment is outrageous. Furthermore, involving teachers as initial identifiers in determining hardship is contra-indicated as they work hard to build a bond and working relationship with students and their parents. It also seems redundant when they are already designated as mandated reporters as per the "suspected child abuse" statute already in place. This statute allows for anonymity which reduces any additional burden on school personnel whose mission is fostering the education of students and places the responsibility for further investigation of underlying conditions of suspected abuse with DCF, an agency funded, trained, and equipped to follow-up such a referral.

More importantly, parents should retain their right to determine what is in the best interest of their underage children. It seems to me that this is dangerous ground on which to legislate and unintended consequences are likely to overshadow the intentions of this bill.

Respectfully,

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March 8, 2021